

# Park Geun-hye's Election as President of South Korea: Implications for Northeast Asia

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## **Abstract**

Park Geun-hye, the first female South Korean president, has brought immense implications to South Korean internal politics as well as external relations. Park's future foreign policy especially will have a great impact on Northeast Asian international relations judging from her mandate as the responsible politician with years of intensive self-training and keen visions into world affairs. The current Korean Peninsula and its adjacent areas are particularly unstable due to the complicated interaction of competitive nations, which are superpowers (like the United States and Russia), regional powers (like China and Japan), and middle powers, along with unstable and provocative North Korea. In which way and to what extent Park Geun-hye will safeguard her country and interact with others, along with how Park will help to shift the international politics in Northeast Asia, will be one of the pivotal issues for the next five years.

**Keywords:** Park Geun-hye, South Korea, North Korea, Korean Peninsula, North-South Korean Relations

## I. Introduction

December 19, 2012 was marked as a glorious day for Ms. Park Geun-hye, as she was elected the new president of the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea), and she would be the hostess of the Chungwadae (Blue House, where the South Korean Presidents live) for the next five years. That date was also an epoch-making milestone for South Korea, since Korean people unprecedentedly elected a female politician as their national leader. Their decision in endorsing a female politician as their chief executive is also seen as unprecedented because of the cliché that, unlike in Western democracies, Korean females are *not appropriate* for assuming the office of the president was overturned during the 2012 South Korean presidential campaign. The South Korean people stated to the world that, regardless of the gender of the political figure, anyone who can be trusted can be their president.

Park Geun-hye's victory shows that there exists no difference between the so-called Western and Eastern, particularly Korean styles of democracy. Also, due to this great process of presidential election, Korea shows that it has passed through the difficult ordeal of whether Korean people can select their national leaders via rational and impartial choices, rather than merely being dictated by gender. Park Geun-hye's success further shows that Korean political democratization since the late 1980s has entered into a formidable stage of democratic solidification—the most difficult part and usually a rocky process common for many developing democracies, but a necessary path leading to a ripe post-modern democracy.<sup>1</sup>

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1. "In 1987, there had been for the first time a peaceful transfer of power through a reasonably democratic election. Over the next decade and further, the focus would be on developing the substance in terms of fairer elections, individual

Park Guen-hye was sworn in as the eighteenth South Korean president in front of tens of thousands of local and overseas guests on February 25, 2013. She delivered her inauguration speech and gave her Korean compatriots a clear message that she is going to devote herself to her country.<sup>2</sup> In her speech, entitled "Opening a New Era of Hope," she took an oath to "live up to the will of the people by achieving economic rejuvenation, the happiness of the people, and the flourishing of the Korean culture." To Park Geun-hye, this is her new era, as it is to the Korean people and the Korean Peninsula, where North and South Korea are in confrontation, especially as the Pyongyang regime has threatened to invade Seoul and put the whole South Korean territory under attack of missiles and bombardment (along with their continuous intimidation of nuclear detonation).<sup>3</sup> Park's takeover as the Korean president, in the meantime, has brought some implications to South Korean internal politics as well as external relations, which both South Koreans and their foreign counterparts highly expect from Ms. Park. Park's future foreign policy especially will have an immense impact on Northeast Asian international relations, judging from her mandate as a responsible politician with

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rights, and a democratization of the culture." Please refer to Michael Breen, *The Koreans: Who They Are, What They Want, Where Their Future Lies* (London: Orion Business Books, 1998), p. 221.

2. Park Geun-hye, "Opening a New Era of Hope," *The Korea Times*, February, 25, 2013, <[http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2013/02/116\\_131077.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2013/02/116_131077.html)>.
3. As North Korea again launched an inter-continental ballistic missile on December 12, 2012, and detonated its third nuclear device on February 12, 2013, South Koreans tend to think North Korea, under the leadership of young Kim Jong-un, is imminently threatening South Korea. Some South Koreans would open the possibility of owning its own indigenous nuclear weaponry. Please refer to Martin Fackler & Choe Sang-hun, "As North Korea Blusters, South Flirts with Talk of Nuclear Arms," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2013, p. A1.

years of intensive self-training and keen visions into world affairs. The current Korean Peninsula and its adjacent areas are particularly unstable due to the complicated interactions of many nations, consisting of superpowers (like the United States and Russia), regional powers (like China and Japan), and middle powers (like North and South Korea). In what way and to what extent Park Geun-hye will safeguard her country and interact with others, in addition to what Park will do to help shift international politics in Northeast Asia, will be the major interests of this analysis.

## II. Why Park Geun-hye?

Park Geun-hye lived in Chungwadae before she was twenty-eight years old, when her father President Park Chung-hee was assassinated by his own intelligence chief in October 1979. Park Chung-hee was the 3<sup>rd</sup> president and served between 1963 and 1979. He was a controversial figure in South Korean history due to Park's arbitrary and authoritarian rule while contributing to the South Korean robust economic development, which became known to the world as the "Miracle on the Han River." When he took power via military *coup d'état* in 1961, South Korea had barely recovered from the damage of the Korean War and the annual per capita income of the South Koreans made it one of the poorest countries in Asia. It was Park Chung-hee's government that launched the first 5-year economic development plan in 1962, and they consecutively launched many other ones. Up until the mid-1970s, Park Chung-hee helped to revive the Korean economy as one of the four Asian Tigers, along with Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> One of Park Chung-hee's achievements was

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4. Stephan Haggard & Chung-in Moon, "The State, Politics, and Economic Development in Postwar South Korea," in Hagen Koo, ed., *State and Society in Contemporary Korea* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 51-93.

his close alliance with the United States for the purpose of defending the ROK. Kim Il-sung's militant attitude and policy vis-à-vis South Korea pushed Park's tilting further towards Washington for better insurance for national security. Under the mediation and persuasion of Washington, Park normalized diplomatic relations with Japan in 1965 (20 years after the Korean national emancipation from the Japanese colonial rule) to echo the U.S. proposal of establishing a solid trilateral alliance among Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington.

Regarding the North-South Korean relations, Park Chung-hee's policy was bold and progressive. In order to pursue a stable situation on the Korean Peninsula, Park sent envoys to North Korea soliciting the possibility of peaceful dialogue. In July 1972, North and South Korea inked an agreement called the *July 4th North-South Joint Statement*, proposing a peaceful resolution of Korean national unification, based on independence from the intervention of external powers.<sup>5</sup> Although the agreement did not last long, Park Chung-hee was regarded as a nationalist leader that was concerned about Korean national unification. Park Chung-hee's decision to revise the South Korean constitution to allow him to stay in power for perpetuity caused serious opposition, both local and overseas. The Fourth Republic, based on the Yushin Constitution, started from 1974, when Park was at his peak of political power; meanwhile, he was described by opponents as a dictator and met with numerous demonstrations demanding his deposition. Also, in 1974, Madam Yook Yong-soo, Park Geun-hye's mother, was assassinated by a Japanese-born North Korean assassin. Park Geun-hye returned from France (where she had been studying language), helped her father, and acted as the first

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5. Soon-sung Cho, "South-North Korean Relations in the Year 2000," in Sung-joo Han & Robert J. Myers, eds., *Korea: The Year 2000* (New York: Carnegie Council on Ethics & International Affairs, 1987), p. 101.

lady of South Korea until Park Chung-hee also was assassinated in 1979. After Park Chung-hee's assassination, Park Geun-hye left the Chungwadae at the age of twenty-seven.

Park Geun-hye gradually passed through the dark years after her family was broken, and she showed her potential of marvelous determination, perseverance, and resoluteness. She did not stop learning, traveling, or getting prepared to become a politician. Park Geun-hye was first elected a Grand National Party (GNP) assemblywoman from Daegu, a cosmopolitan city in central Korea, in a 1998 by-election and was elected three more times in the same electoral district between 1998 and 2008, being the incumbent assemblywoman until April 2012. During her 2007 presidential bid, Park tried to be the nominee of the GNP, but lost to Lee Myung-bak by a narrow margin. Park was again elected as a proportionate representative in the April 2012 election, when the ruling party changed its name to be "Saenuri (meaning 'New Frontier') Party." Park Geun-hye led the Saenuri Party in winning against the opposing Democratic United Party (DUP) in the 2012 General Election. The Saenuri won 152 seats and retained its majority position, which showed Park Geun-hye's caliber in leading a conservative ruling party. Most of the South Korean mass media would consider the most important factor leading to Saenuri's victory to be Park Geun-hye's leadership.

During the 2012 presidential campaign, Park Geun-hye competed with Moon Jae-in of the Democratic United Party and an independent candidate, Ahn Cheol-soo. Moon Jae-in represented the leftist groups, since he served as Secretary General of late President Noh Moo-hyun's office. Moon strongly hailed the leftist line of national construction and association with North Korea, including a "Peace and Prosperity Policy" believed to be the successor of President Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy," with both of them proposing a soft

line policy toward Pyongyang. In internal affairs, Moon also stressed the necessity of pursuing a policy of “economic democratization” focused more on benefits of laborers and lower classes, based on the detraction of revenues of big business. According to Moon, the social property or wealth should be more evenly redistributed. Ahn Cheol-soo, on the other hand, a former IT businessman and the Dean of the Graduate School of Convergence Science and Technology at Seoul National University, emerged to become a competent and competitive candidate for presidency. In fact, both Moon and Ahn were invited by the opposition forces to cooperate so as to defeat the ruling Saenuri and its presidential nominee. Nevertheless, Moon and Ahn failed to merge into a single coalition, and Ahn announced he was leaving the campaign. Park Geun-hye eventually was elected as the President of South Korea on December 19, 2012, with the approval of 51.55% of Korean voters, compared to Moon Jae-in's 48.02%.

Many would attribute Park Geun-hye's victory to her being the “princess from the Chungwadae,” *i.e.*, a special father-to-daughter relationship with Park Chung-hee. They think Park Geun-hye must have inherited lots of Park Chung-hee's assets so Park Geun-hye could be a nationally well-known woman and, consequently, possess immense chance and room that may be leverage against other competitors. In fact, Park Geun-hye's connection to Park's legacy may be an asset, but not necessarily that helpful—as some points are even liabilities. To some Koreans, Park Chung-hee's authoritarian rule may still be traumatic, so they may not be supportive of Park Geun-hye's bid.<sup>6</sup>

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6. Park Geun-hye made apologies several times while she was running for the presidency. She expressed her regret that her father might have brought about sorrow to the Korean people during Park Chung-hee's 18 years of rule from 1962 to 1979.

The real contributing factors to Park's victory are numerous, *e.g.*, Park's strict, no-compromise adherence to political promises, including her successful reversion in 2010 to President Lee Myung-bak's canceling the establishment of Sejong City, a new national center of administration, arguing the plan was according to the law and a promise made to the people. Also, in addition to her leadership, Park Geun-hye's broader vision of international relations and her friendship with some foreign leaders gave her leverage. This factor would tell the Koreans that a national leader like Park Geun-hye would be much capable than others in dealing with complicated world affairs. Park Geun-hye is decent, devoted, and hard-working; Korean people clearly saw how Park stayed firm when she was cut in the face by a man with a knife when she ran for election. Last but not least, Park also proclaimed that she would also take the idea of "economic democratization" in dealing with the gap between the rich and the poor if she was elected. In other words, some of the policies upheld by opposition leaders could be melted into Park's own policy priorities, which helped attract more supporters and detract from the votes of the opponents' camps. Park Geun-hye's winning the presidency has become one of the exciting events of East Asia last year, and it will continue to be a shining victory that makes many Korean people feel proud.

### III. Internal Politics Park Encounters

Park Geun-hye's victory was a gain for the conservative camp and a loss for the "progressive" political forces led by the left and opposition parties. Moon Jae-in, the candidate from the DUP lost by a small margin of 1.08 million votes, which was only about one thirtieth of the total votes cast. Both the Saenuri and the DUP fully mobilized during the presidential campaign, and both Moon and Park expressed their confidence about winning the cutthroat competition.



Both of them bore great expectations from their respective supporters. Moon was largely supported by the middle class, workers, small businesses, poor people, and younger generations; while Park was supported by farmers, large companies, rich people, and managerial levels. The end of the presidential campaign should have been the end of the social cleavage caused by elections, but the reality may not be this simple. Korean politics notably are filled with no compromise, firm antagonism, and persisting belligerence. The hatred between Park's camp and the opposing ones will have to be dealt with and healed in the years to come. Also, Park was primarily supported by people living in rural areas, southeastern provinces, and some places that benefited from the government's industrial investment, but Moon was supported by Koreans living in southwest provinces like North and South Cholla, where Kim Dae-jung was born and progressive ideas often have prevailed. Due to these circumstances, a vexing problem of regionalism often prevents Korean people from cooperating and accommodating, making South Korea less cohesive. These are the immediate problems Park Geun-hye has to overcome.

The idea "economic democratization" proclaimed by Park Geun-hye needs to be carried out so as to cease the worsening of the unequal wealth distribution and the resentment of the classes suffering from lower income or unfair deprivation of economic rights.<sup>7</sup> Ever since the Park Chung-hee era, many South Korean governments have stressed the decisive role of the big companies, or *chaebol*, and have

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7. Both Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in, as the two rival presidential candidates, squared off over the conglomerate-led Korean economy in the television debate, as their campaigns revolved around economic democratization and government accountability. Please refer to Lee Joo-hee, "Rivals clash over chaebol reform," *The Korea Herald*, December 10, 2012, <<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20121210001032>>.

provided sufficient financial and technological aid to them. During Lee Myung-bak's tenure, the ten largest *chaebols* possessed about 60% of the total national income. To remedy this unfair tendency, Park has promised to launch more public policies to release the burdens of the poor and small businesses. The mission of leading "economic democratization" may be difficult to define, and it may not be accomplished for years. The government has to increase national investment so as to lift the employment rate. Also, the government has to keep an eye on whether a secure and fair social and economic order can be maintained to protect the Korean society from defeating itself. Park Geun-hye was one of the first Asian politicians to touch upon the issue of social security based on "economic democratization," through which Park can be a good pioneer that may invite other foreign leading politicians to follow suit.

South Korea has been afflicted by an economic recession that was caused by, first of all, the financial tsunami of 2008 and, second, the European debt crisis starting from 2011. Some European countries went to the brink of collapse, and the United States has even cut its public as well as national investment, including its military budgets. With regard to these factors, the Korean trade volume witnessed a rapid decline. What the South Korean government and President Park have to jointly accomplish is to renovate Korean international trade, attract international tourists, and generate more revenue from trade. Especially after Japan's Abe administration decided to let the Japanese yen depreciate, South Korea has felt severely threatened. It is thought that the Korean won would inevitably depreciate for the purpose of better exports. If this is the case, a serious depreciation competition or currency war will follow and arouse new rounds of trade wars.

#### **IV. South Korea's External Environment**

In her inauguration speech, Park Geun-hye linked her hope of building an “era of happiness” and better contribution of South Korea throughout the global community. Park expressed her ambition when she said: “to ease tensions and conflicts and further spread peace and cooperation in Asia,” she will “work to strengthen trust with countries in the region including the United States, China, Japan and Russia and other Asian and Oceanic countries.” In addition, Park says that she would “envision a Korea that shares more deeply the travails of others while also contributing to the resolution of key global issues.”

Park correctly touches upon an essential development in Asia, *i.e.*, the turbulent situation aroused by political distrust, nationalist sentiment, economic competition, and an arms race. It is a truism that, for South Korea's benefit, Seoul has to “strengthen trust with its neighboring countries,” as the Korean Peninsula is the centerpiece of that cooperation and/or confrontation. South Korea is very sensitive to the shifts and challenges in Northeast Asia, where many big powers' influence cross paths. In the Cold War era, South Korea kept an intimate alliance with the United States and Japan to defend itself from the possible intimidation of North Korea. The Korean War, from 1950 to 1953, made the forces of the United Nations, primarily led by the United States, become deeply involved in the fate of South Korea, with sixteen allied countries intervening in the Korean War so South Korea could be saved. South Korea knows how important it is to keep its alliance with the United States vividly guaranteed. Under the mediation of Washington, South Korea began to cooperate with Japan hand in hand for their national security. The trilateral relations among South Korea, Japan, and the United States have thus been knit tightly to the backbone of the stability of Northeast Asia.

Owing to their geographical proximity and due to China and Russia's influence over North Korea, South Korea has to consider secure if not formidable contacts with both China and Russia. Park Chung-hee used his *June 23 Declaration* in 1973 to announce that South Korea would consider opening its door to those countries differing from South Korea in terms of political systems and ideologies, *i.e.*, communist countries, including China, the Soviet Union, and other socialist countries. Park Chung-hee's purpose was to ameliorate its ties with the aforementioned communist countries for economic reasons, like improvement of trade ties, and advance a diplomatic campaign against the Pyongyang regime.<sup>8</sup> Although Park Chung-hee might not have been successful in attaining his ambition due to the rigid international political structure at the height of the Cold War, President Chun Doo-hwan continued Park Chung-hee's efforts in the 1980s, searching for a policy of *nordpolitik*, *i.e.*, to normalize South Korean diplomatic ties with all communist countries. It was during President Roh Tae-woo's tenure that diplomatic relations were established successfully with both the Soviet Union (1990) and China (1992).

After the end of the Cold War, South Korea's relations with both China and Russia were further solidified. South Korea has taken its economic caliber, high-technology, and know-how in participating or assisting its neighboring giants to become an indispensable partner to them. South Korea's diplomatic success has brought about national security in that China and Russia have had to maintain at least equal-distant relations with both Koreas. Most of the time in the post-Cold

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8. This is what has been understood as South Korea's renouncing the Hallstein Doctrine, representing Seoul's extremely active diplomacy. Please refer to Barry K. Gills, *Korea versus Korea: A Case of Contested Legitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 159-160.

War era, South Korea has kept leverage over North Korea in winning friendship from Beijing and Moscow, particularly when Pyongyang began to adopt an adventurist policy in disturbing international security. Pyongyang furthermore has been regarded as a troublemaker, especially when it has tried to advance the development of both nuclear weaponry and inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

South Korea's economic miracle since the early 1970s has been a legendary story to most of the developing world, and South Korea also has shown its goodwill in assisting others on their road to modernization. In 1996, South Korea was accepted as a new member of the Organization of Economic and Cooperation Development (OECD) because of South Korea's rapid and outstanding economic achievement, primarily, its high per capita income. In sharp contrast, North Korea became backward and poor after suffering from numerous natural disasters and managerial malfunctions. Although South Korea was severely impacted by the Asian financial crisis in 1997, South Korea successfully adjusted and renovated its banking systems as well as promoted its effectiveness of productivity so as to recover quickly. In Park Geun-hye's inauguration speech, she mentioned the "Miracle on the Han River" several times and pledged to "embark on the making of a Second Miracle on the Han River."

The successful story of the Han River was first accomplished by Geun-hye's father; her reiteration of this legend makes South Koreans reminisce about Park Chung-hee and Geun-hye's commitment to this heritage. If the "Second Miracle" can be attained, South Korea will be able to further advance its people's living standard and shed a light to Northeast Asian co-prosperity as a whole. There, however, is a long way to go before Park Geun-hye can lead her fellow countrymen in making another round of such an economic miracle because of the restraints of the international recession and the stagnated

increase in South Korean international trade. Nonetheless, South Korea is now the thirteenth largest economy of the world, and one of the “20-50 Club,” which is composed of the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, and South Korea, with the “20-50” meaning being the per capita income of the club members exceeding US\$20,000 and the population exceeding 50 million people.

In contrast to South Korea’s economic and technological advancement, Seoul now is encountering some challenges in its external environment. First of all, besides the adversity caused by the European financial crisis and the American economic stagnation, South Korea’s relations with Japan have been sour in recent years due to their disputes over the sovereignty of *Tokdo/Takeshima* Island, a small island in the Japan Sea that is roughly equally near to both them. The island is now controlled by the South Korean side, but often under Japan’s protest. Due to this territorial dispute, mutual trust has been downgraded while nationalist sentiment has been stirred, so cooperation in other arenas, particularly in security and the North Korean issue, seems to be difficult. Some pundits worry about the future of Japan-Korean relations under such circumstances, but one should remember that Park Chung-hee resumed diplomatic relations with Japan in 1965 under fierce street demonstrations. Regarding this, Park Geun-hye has already showed her willingness to advance their bilateral ties.

Korean people have had an ambivalent feeling toward Washington and the U.S. military presence in East Asia or South Korea. Some anti-American sentiment has occurred before, when the Koreans suspected the motivation of the U.S. involvement in Korean affairs. Some of them would take it for granted that the U.S. military presence in South Korea and its adjacent area would invite the hostility of North Korea, make South Korea more insecure, and be conducive to

the perpetuation of the North-South Korean division. In the past, especially during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, South Korea was much too hasty in associating with Kim Jong-il of North Korea at the expense of its mutual trust with the United States. This adverse situation was rectified during the Lee Myung-bak administration; nonetheless, Lee was again accused of too closely complying with Washington's interest at the cost of stable relations with North Korea. South Korea's alliance has been and still is the centerpiece of ROK's national security, but it is better for Seoul not to unnecessarily provoke Pyongyang. Park Geun-hye has been known to be prudent and calm in decision-making; it should be an immediate and crucial task for her to strike a balance.

China has been South Korea's largest trading partner. The PRC would prefer that North Korea stay static, *i.e.*, Pyongyang could keep its regime stable and safe but not upset the status quo of a divided Korea in the meantime. North Korea's launch of ICBMs and detonation of nuclear devices are regarded by Beijing as unacceptable and detrimental to the stability of Northeast Asia. China would appreciate it if North Korea showed self-restraint and adopted an "open-and-reform policy" that is similar to China's experience, but it seems that North Korea pays little attention to China's interests and appeals. Therefore, in recent years, China has shifted its previous policy supportive to North Korea's provocative activities into an obviously passive attitude. Many years ago, when the United Nations would discuss the North Korean threat, China usually opposed the passage of sanctions against North Korea and sometimes abstained. The situation has changed now as China again deals with the Korean security issues, particularly when China cooperated with the United States in proposing the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC's) *Resolution 2087* condemning a third North Korean nuclear detonation on March 7, 2013. In fact, South Korea is better off when China adopts such

a friendly policy, which is definitely appreciated by the South Korean government and people. The six-party talks are now in a stalemate after six rounds of off-and-on sessions. Both China and South Korea, along with Japan, Russia, and the United States, are eager to resume the dialogues. Prior to the final resolution of the security issue of the Korean Peninsula, one can conclude Beijing and Seoul have mutual interests in keeping the situation under control.<sup>9</sup>

## V. The North-South Korean Relations

North and South Korean relations have deteriorated since Lee Myung-bak's taking power in 2008, as Lee drastically revised the accommodative policies adopted by his two predecessors. Lee envisioned that new and stable North and South Korean relations should be based on reciprocity, *i.e.*, North Korea should not get concessions from Seoul without contributing to the peace and prosperity on the peninsula. According to Lee Myung-bak, North Korea will have to abandon its nuclear development and stay in the six-party talks to expect humanitarian aid from Seoul. South Korea's unilateral goodwill to Pyongyang while North Korea continues threatening South Korea can no longer be accepted or tolerated. Lee proposed the policy of "denuclearization, open, 3000" as the backbone of his North Korean policy. In his proposal, he agreed to assist the North Korean regime in economic development, and he promised to help North Korean per capita income annually exceed US\$3,000 if Pyongyang agreed to cease its nuclear development program.<sup>10</sup> It seems that North Korea will not forsake its nuclear program, for Pyongyang takes nuclear

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9. "Tough and Moderate: Park must add creative diplomacy to military readiness," *The Korea Times*, March 10, 2013, <[http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2013/04/202\\_131845.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2013/04/202_131845.html)>.

10. Park Yoon-beom, "Unification by Sunshine Policy," *The Korea Times*, May 31, 2012, <[http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/05/113\\_112137.html](http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/05/113_112137.html)>.



weaponry as one of the primary criteria leading to its national goal of building a “*kangsong daeguk*” (a strong and prosperous country).

To assure South Korea's national security, South Korea has to make sure that the United States will continue to support its ally and keep Washington's security commitment. Lee Myung-bak maintained close cooperation with the United States, Japan, and others. North Korea's anger was obvious; therefore, North Korea's provocations became inevitable. Ever since 2009, North and South relations have worsened, as North Korea walked out of the six-party talks and has not yet returned. Besides, South Korean workers and managers were forced to leave the Kaesong Industrial Complex, which resulted in a shutdown of the industrial park. In the same year, a female tourist was shot to death in the Kumkangsan area, a border area that attracts South Korean visitors, by a North Korean soldier, and North Korea refused to apologize. All of the clashes helped ferment a very belligerent mood between them. In March 2010, the South Korean navy vessel “*Cheonan*” was sunk and cost 46 casualties; in November, Yeonpyong Island was bombarded with four citizens killed. The strident hostility never changed before Park Geun-hye took power.

The North-South Korean relations has slid to an even worse situation, in which both of them exchanged belligerent accusations against each other and threatened to use force. The extremely hostile attitude expressed by both Pyongyang and Seoul has made their strident relations escalate to a high tide. North Korea launched ICBMs (Pyongyang insisted they were launching a satellite) on December 12, 2012, showing animosity towards the South Korean presidential election dated a week later. The UNSC passed a resolution in condemning North Korea for such a provoking activity. Again, it was widely speculated that North Korea detonated its third nuclear device since 2006. The UNSC immediately passed *Resolution 2094* on March

7, 2013, to the effect that North Korea will be severely sanctioned. The UNSC sanction again raised strong protest from North Korea, with Pyongyang announcing its counterproposal in “condemning the United Nations.”

South Korea and the United States made their “Key Resolve” military maneuver public from March 11; North Korea went further in announcing its de-recognition, as of March 11, of the armistice agreement signed among Pyongyang, Beijing, and Washington in July 1953, signaling the termination of the three-year Korean War. In addition, North Korea also cut the North-South Korean hotline and threatened to attack offshore South Korean islands along the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Besides North Korean invasion of South Korean offshore islands, other possible attacks include attacks on South Korean fishing boats, bombardment of the South Korean side of the demarcation line, and cyber attacks.

It has been widely agreed that Kim Jong-un, the current leader of North Korea, made a series of provocative activities to consolidate his power within North Korea, whose starving masses have little else to celebrate except for launching of ICBMs and detonation of nuclear devices. The North Korean deed, however, is a grave provocation to the international community, even to its principal ally China. It can be seen that the Junior Kim is continuing the deliberately provocative strategy adopted by his father and is pushing more to South Korea and the United States for compromise. In addition, what Kim Jong-un did was to send signals to Seoul, Beijing, and Washington that North Korea’s status as a nuclear power should be recognized. Kim Jong-un also was using the tactics of blackmail to South Korea so that the newly-founded Park Geun-hye government should adopt a soft and/or conciliatory policy toward Pyongyang, which will be different from what Lee Myung-bak did. The problem is that North

Korea may not achieve its objectives through provocation. Neither can North Korea be better off by means of these tactics if Park Geun-hye and her government do not buy them.

Park Geun-hye made her North Korea policy very clear when she ran for the presidency, in that she emphasized reciprocity and trust-building as the backbones of linking with Pyongyang. As the South Korean president, Park will have to take the stability between North and South Korea as the centerpiece of her national security. North Korea's provocative gestures may not indicate that the nuclear or conventional attacks from North Korea are imminent, but the most current polls have shown that many South Koreans have changed their attitudes. According to the public opinion surveys made by Seoul's Asan Institute, led by Chung Mong-joon as an academic branch of the Hyundai Company, about two-thirds of the Korean people surveyed would appreciate the United States reconsidering positioning nuclear weaponry on the Korean Peninsula, as both North and South Korea asked that nuclear weaponry leave after they signed the No-Nuclear Treaty in 1991. Otherwise, they expressed that South Korea will have to develop its own indigenous nuclear weaponry system so as to make a counterbalance against the North.<sup>11</sup> North Korea's nuclear buildup may not make the South Korean try justified, since this will overthrow the framework of the Nuclear *Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)* and make the Korean Peninsula even more dangerous.

Park Geun-hye will have to stay firm that her deal with Pyongyang is still effective, that North Korea is not allowed to use nuclear wea-

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11. Chung Min-uck, "Rep. Chung says 'scrap command transfer'," *The Korea Times*, March 11, 2013, <[http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2013/03/113\\_131871.html](http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2013/03/113_131871.html)>.

ponry to intimidate the South, and that South Korea will undoubtedly retaliate against North Korea if it is attacked. Park Geun-hye's message to North Korea has been very clear, and there is no room for any misperception or miscalculation by the other side. Park Geun-hye will appreciate the further strengthening of the U.S.-Korea defense treaty, in particular, Washington's commitment of providing immediate aid to Seoul. Knowing this, Park will have to solidify its alliance system with the United States. The original plan for the United States to hand the wartime command power of troops in Korea back to South Korea in December of 2015 would have to be revised due to the serious situation on the peninsula. This policy shift reflects the U.S.-ROK joint alert in defense, and it also has made the security benefit of the two nations tightly knit together. In her presidency, Park Geun-hye also has to suppress the hawkish generals and citizens so as not to provoke Pyongyang's hostility to the point of no return. With North Korea's external behavior being difficult to predict, it is still feasible that Kim Jong-un, after his political power is further solidified and economic situation improved, will allow Park Geun-hye to push for political dialogue with North Korea. Park Geun-hye's experience visiting the late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in 2002 and her resoluteness and pragmatic prudence turn out to be especially useful, leading to a more stabilized North-South Korean relationship—this tendency will be conducive to Northeast Asian security.

## VI. Conclusion

As the first female President of South Korea, Park Geun-hye has received the mandate of support of her fellow citizens and their national leader for the next five years. Park Geun-hye being elected as South Korea's highest executive helps to make manifest the successful story of the Korean political democratization since the late 1980s and also is the symbol of the Korean democratic solidarity.

This is not only Park's glory but also the success of the Korean people. Park is the daughter of the late President Park Chung-hee, and she inherited the most conspicuous merits of loyalty to her country, devotion to the South Korean continuing prosperity and development, and belief in promoting better relations with South Korea's allies and its neighboring states, along with efforts in achieving a "*trustpolitik*" vis-à-vis the North Korea. As a female leader, Park will be the spotlight of the future domestic as well as international media whenever she appears and wherever she goes. She could be the representative of the "soft power" of Korea and the token of South Korea's "attraction and persuasion" when associating with leaders from other countries. Female presidents, like Park Geun-hye, should be decent, firm, and confident, but not aggressive, direct, or cool like their male counterparts.

Park Geun-hye's domestic imperatives will involve healing the social cleavage resulting from the presidential election and many other previous power struggles, since the small margin in winning the election means almost half of the voters did not agree with Park's policy, as proclaimed during the election campaign. Park's other policy priority will be how to narrow the gap between the rich and poor, that is, the economic democratization she mentioned to help her win the election. Many previous Korean presidents have vowed to deal with the issue, but with less progress due to the boycott of big businesses and the adversity of the Korean economy. The Korean economy has been not so encouraging, due to shrinking exports and the financial crisis on a global level. Park has to be, and will be, dedicated in accelerating the Korean economy by making more investment in IT and crucial infrastructure to make South Korea the hub of international business activities. Only through these efforts can South Korea maintain stable economic development as the basis of continuing democratic solidification.

Park Geun-hye will have to exert the same degree of wisdom and effort to solve the international environment that South Korea encounters. South Korea is a tiny state with a crowded population mostly living in urban areas, especially the Seoul cosmopolitan area (with one-fourth of the population). Thus, South Korea is very vulnerable to natural disasters or sudden attacks by North Korea; even cyber attacks will cause a devastating outcome. It is imperative for South Korea to establish rational, reasonable, and accommodating relations with all of its neighboring states, like the United States, China, Japan, and Russia. The multinational relations may be too complicated to be handled by South Korea itself, but what South Korea has done so far is to make sure each pair of bilateral ties with all the aforementioned nations can be amicable, stable, and controllable. South Korea's political and strategic relations with the United States go all the way back to South Korea's independence, and Park's government will continue to strengthen its cooperation with Washington to ensure its own national security, which is conducive to regional stability. South Korea will have to depend more on China's goodwill in joint efforts in containing the North Korean nuclear development and adventurist policy. In other words, South Korea will have to strengthen its friendly association with China, especially as both of them are the other's crucial trading partner. South Korea will have to better its ties with Japan, but the vexing problem is still in the *Tokdo/Takeshima* issue. Although this issue cannot be solved quickly, Park Geun-hye's prudent and rational attitude toward Japan may separate herself from her predecessors.

North Korea will be the major threat of South Korea for many years to come, Park Geun-hye's "trust-building" policy, although unparalleled with the those of either Kim Dae-jung or Roh Moo-hyuan, will be more conciliatory to Pyongyang. After several months of North Korea's provocative activities, like launching missiles and nu-

clear detonations from late 2012, South Korea has encountered very unstable, or more precisely, hostile intimidation from North Korea. North Korea's threat thus seems to be the ordeal that Park Geun-hye finds as the first security priority, but it cannot easily be dealt with. North Korea is used to calming down after wielding a military threat, given that Beijing, the major source of support for Pyongyang, does not want to be North Korea's backup.

Park Geun-hye tends to cooperate more with its adjacent powers, including the United States and China, in carefully engaging North Korea. Park's North Korean policy has been firm, but it has flexibility for possible dialogue if Kim Jong-un should be willing to resume dialogue. Park Geun-hye's soft, decent, and prudent characteristics will be conducive in paving such a path to North and South Korea's new relations.

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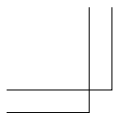
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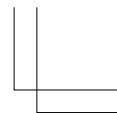
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